

24 JUNE 1983  
 FB M 83-10029

# PLO: GROWING CONCERN OVER DISSIDENT THREAT

*Extensive Middle East media reporting over the past few days has reflected growing concern within Yasir 'Arafat's mainstream Fatah faction to find ways to contain the insurrection of dissident Fatah elements led by Colonel Sa'id Musa Muragha (Abu Musa). In dealing with the rebellion 'Arafat has adopted a two-track approach, seeking ground for compromise with the dissidents and calling on supporters throughout the Arab world to bolster his position. Allegations that Syria intervened in recent fighting on behalf of the dissidents have been denied by Damascus, but the tone of the Syrian denials has reflected continuing support for the dissidents' position.*

## CONCILIATION EFFORTS

A Fatah Revolution Council communique, broadcast on 22 June by the mainstream Fatah-controlled Voice of the PLO, attempted to demonstrate that Fatah shares the dissidents' aims by emphasizing support for traditional hardline Palestinian positions on a number of issues. The communique asserted that the dissident movement--which among other things has demanded Arab rejection of President Reagan's peace plan and of talks on Jordanian-Palestinian confederation, and has sought a Fatah rapprochement with Syria--staged a military attack on mainstream Fatah forces in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. Its demands had already been met.

At the same time Fatah has sought compromise by suggesting it shares basic aims with the dissidents, it has made it clear that it cannot accept all their demands. The dissidents were said to have rejected a number of proposals designed to restore unity to the Palestinian movement and instead to have "asked for an ad hoc committee to lead the movement until the convocation of a general congress." This demand, the communique said, was unacceptable.

The dual approach of attempting to accommodate some of the dissidents' demands while refusing to go along with others is consistent with remarks made by other Fatah officials. 'Arafat spokesman Ahmad 'Abd ar-Rahman was quoted by REUTER on the 22d, for example, as having "accepted all the dissidents' political demands" except the creation of an emergency committee. According to REUTER, 'Abd ar-Rahman "said he thought their political demands were now shown to have been a disguise for a bid simply to remove 'Arafat."

24 JUNE 1983  
FB M 83-10029

The Revolution Council communique also sought to minimize the impact of the rebellion by depicting the dissidents as isolated extremists who do not have the support of traditional hardline PLO factions such as the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The rebellion was portrayed further as being spurred by radical longtime opponents of 'Arafat such as Fatah's Nimr Salih and Libyan leader al-Qadhafi.

#### 'ARAFAT APPEALS FOR SUPPORT

While seeking ground for compromise with the dissidents, 'Arafat has sought to shore up his position by appealing for support from Arab leaders. Following the armed clashes in the Biqa' Valley on 21 June, various Middle East media reported that a flurry of messages appealing for support had been sent by 'Arafat to, among others, Saudi Arabia's King Fahd, Jordan's King Husayn, and the leaders of several Gulf states. According to the Voice of the PLO on the 22d, 'Arafat also sent a message to Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad in which he expressed concern over a "serious change in the Syrian position," an allusion to allegations of Syrian military support for the dissidents. Supportive responses were received from a number of sources, including most notably King Fahd.

#### SYRIAN ROLE

Damascus has flatly denied the numerous media reports of allegations that Syria provided military support to the dissidents. Damascus radio on 22 June quoted a "responsible source" as saying that the accusations were "groundless" and that "Syria calls for the unity of all parties." According to a KUWAIT NEWS AGENCY report on the 23d, Syrian Foreign Minister 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam admitted Syrian intervention in the Biqa' clashes to Arab League Secretary General Chedli Klibi but claimed that this involvement was only "to protect 'Arafat's people." At the same time, the previous day's Damascus radio report left little doubt that Syria supports the dissidents and blames elements in 'Arafat's mainstream Fatah faction for continuing the factional dispute. The report stated that a proposed Syrian Ba'th Party mediation committee had been rejected by "the party which slandered Syria." It concluded that "those who have failed in settling their internal problems, which were caused by their big mistakes and takes and their shortsightedness, must realize that these problems cannot be settled by shirking responsibility and blaming Syria." Similar Syrian denials were voiced the same day in a Damascus radio commentary and by the Damascus daily ATH-THAWRAH.

24 JUNE 1983  
FB M 83-10029

Tacit Syrian support for the dissidents was also evident in Syrian publicity given to a statement made by dissident leader Abu Musa and carried on the 21st by the SYRIAN ARAB NEWS AGENCY. Abu Musa blamed the Biqa' fighting on the PLO "deviationist leadership," adding that his group's strike against Fatah positions was carried out to preempt a decision by 'Arafat to attack.